

2. Notes on the Habits of the Aye-aye of Madagascar in its Native State. By L. BARON, L.M.S. Missionary.

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Having recently passed through that part of Madagascar which is the habitat of the Aye-aye, and having made careful inquiries from the Malagasy respecting the habits of this strange creature in its native haunts, I have thought that the information gained might be of interest to the members of the Society, and have therefore noted down the results of my inquiries.

The Aye-aye lives in the dense parts of the great forest that runs along the eastern border of the central plateau of the island, but only in that part of it which separates the Sibànaka province from that of the Bétsimisàraka, and which is about twenty-five miles from the east coast, in latitude $17^{\circ}22'$ S. or thereabouts. Possibly there are other parts of the country where the Aye-aye is found; but so far as my knowledge extends (and I have made inquiries in different parts of the island) this is the only region where the creature finds its home. In Carpenter's 'Zoology' the Aye-aye is said to be "very rare even in its native country;" and Mr. Gosse, in one of his books, conjectures that it is probably nearly extinct. From what I have gathered from the natives, it seems to be pretty common, its nocturnal habits and the superstitious awe with which it is regarded (and of which I shall presently speak) accounting for its apparent rarity.

The native name of the animal is Haihay (Hihì); but this is not derived from the "exclamations of surprise" which the natives "exhibited at the sight of an unknown animal," but is simply onomatopoeic, the creature's call being "Haihay, Haihay." The animal, as is well known, is nocturnal in its habits, prowling about in pairs—male and female. It has but one young one at a birth. It builds a nest about two feet in diameter, of twigs and dried leaves, in the dense foliage of the upper branches of trees. In this it spends the day in sleep. The nest is entered by a hole at the side.

The teeth are used in scratching away the bark of trees in search of insects, and the long claw in digging out the prey when found. A white insect called *Andraitra* (possibly the larva of some beetle) seems to form its chief food. I was told that it frequently taps the bark with its fore feet, and then listens for the movement of its prey beneath, thus saving itself useless labour. It does not flee at the sight of man, showing that for generations it has not been molested by him; which is indeed true, as the following will show. The natives have a superstitious fear of the creature, believing that it possesses some supernatural power by which it can destroy those who seek to capture it or do it harm. The consequence of this is that it is with the greatest difficulty one can obtain a specimen. With most of the people no amount of money would be a sufficient inducement to go in pursuit of the creature, "because," say they,

“we value our own lives more than money.” It is only a few of the more daring spirits among them who, knowing the *òding*, *i. e.* the secret by which they can disarm it of its dreaded power, have the courage to attempt its capture. Occasionally it is brought to Tamatave for sale, where it realizes a good sum. Now and then it is accidentally caught in the traps which the natives set for Lemurs; but the owner of the trap, unless one of those versed in the Aye-aye mysteries, who knows the charm by which to counteract its evil power, smears fat over it, thus securing its forgiveness and goodwill, and then sets it free. The story goes that occasionally when a person sleeps in the forest the Aye-aye brings a pillow for him: if a pillow for the head, the person will become rich; if for the feet, he will shortly succumb to the creature’s fatal power, or at least will become bewitched. Such is the account the natives give of the curious *Chiromys madagascariensis*.

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3. On the Natural Position of the Family *Dipodidæ*.

By G. E. DOBSON, M.A., M.B.

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Since Mr. G. R. Waterhouse, in 1839, proposed what may be with justice termed the first approach to a natural arrangement of the families of Rodentia, other systems of classification, down to that of Alston in 1876, have from time to time appeared. In all, however, the family *Dipodidæ* has been placed either next the *Muridæ*, or in the same group with them, being separated from the hystriicine rodents evidently mainly on account of the united condition of the tibia and fibula, but possibly also by some of the older zoologists on account of the superficial resemblance borne by one of the species at least to the true Mice. The object of this communication is to show that the position hitherto assigned to these rodents cannot be maintained on natural grounds.

Lately, while investigating the various modes of arrangement of the long flexor muscles of the feet of Mammalia, I was struck by the fact that the species of *Dipodidæ* agreed altogether in the united condition of the tendons of these muscles with the hystriicine rodents, and not with the *Myomorpha*, in which group they have hitherto been placed. The importance of this character, which I have elsewhere¹ fully demonstrated, led me to carefully inquire into the value of the so-called murine affinities of the *Dipodidæ*, with the result that these may be said to consist only in the united condition of the leg-bones. On the other hand, all the lead-

¹ In a paper, “On the Homologies of the Long Flexor Muscles of the Feet of Mammalia,” read before the Biological Section of the British Association for the Advancement of Science at Southampton, in August last, and subsequently published in the ‘Journal of Anatomy and Physiology,’ vol. xvii. (1882-83).